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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: Joseph Peterson

INTERVIEWER: Steve Spangler

SPANGLER: This is an interview with Joseph T. Peterson for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Steve Spangler at Grundy County at Mr. Peterson's home on May 12, 1973, at eleven o'clock.

SPANGLER: Mr. Peterson, could you tell us anything about your ancestors?

PETERSON: Well, they were dead and gone before I was born--well, my paternal grandfather was. He was buried at sea, I guess, the way I understood. It was before my time. But my maternal grandfather stayed with us. They lived with us until they were called out of this world.

SPANGLER: I see, and then they were from Norway?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: And you don't know any ancestors over there now?

PETERSON: No. They were all here.

SPANGLER: I see. They came over at the opening up of this new world.

PETERSON: It would have been in the middle of the nineteenth century.

SPANGLER: Did your grandfather, your paternal grandfather, every say anything to you that you could remember?

PETERSON: I never saw him. He was buried at sea.

SPANGLER: Oh, I see. I'm sorry.

PETERSON: But my maternal grandfather took me to school the first day I ever went to school. I can remember him.

SPANGLER: How old were you then?

PETERSON: About seven years old.

SPANGLER: Where was that school located?

PETERSON: It was the Everson School over in Saratoga Township.

SPANGLER: Well, that was a little ways from here then.

PETERSON: No, it was a mile east of five corners. We lived a half-mile north. It was closer than our own school that was two miles away, but we belonged to this district, so after my first term in school all of us went to school in our own district school at Ness School.

SPANGLER: What courses did you have in school? What subjects did you study?

PETERSON: That was reading, writing, and arithmetic. [laughter]

SPANGLER: You were telling me before that you had readers then. There wasn't any such thing as eighth grade?

PETERSON: No, there wasn't. Not any grades. It was just first, second, third, fourth, and fifth readers. Then A, B, and C arithmetic and that was all.

SPANGLER: Do you remember anything that happened to you in school or maybe on the way to school?

PETERSON: Well, I can remember one thing and I still have it in my mind and that was the teacher who offered us a prize if we could repeat the multiplication tables both forward and backward without a mistake. I was the only one that could do it, and I got a penknife for doing it. I can remember that.

SPANGLER: That was a pretty amazing feat. How many kids were in the class?

PETERSON: Oh, I couldn't say. There must have been eight or nine, I guess.

SPANGLER: And that was all the grades, all the readers put together right there?

PETERSON: No, it was our class, A or B class. No, I expect maybe it was B class being that we had multiplication tables. Well, you had all the tables, you know. You wouldn't expect the lower readers to repeat the tables in primary class you know.

SPANGLER: What did you have as far as writing? Did you do a lot of writing?

PETERSON: Well, we had copy books. I bet you don't know what that is.

SPANGLER: No, I don't.

PETERSON: We had a sheet like this and they had a copy at the top and it was on the sheet. It slid down as you wrote the page.

SPANGLER: No, I don't believe I've ever heard of that.

PETERSON: That was our writing.

SPANGLER: Was this a one-room school?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: I see, and then it was heated by what?

PETERSON: A coal furnace. We had a pot-bellied stove at first but then they put in a hot air furnace.

SPANGLER: What did a day consist of after you came home from school? Say you were getting up in the morning and going to school, what would your day consist of--doing the chores and stuff?

PETERSON: Well, we had so far to walk that I couldn't do any chores before I left. And in the wintertime it was dark before you came home, you know.

SPANGLER: And so you really didn't get any chores done until you were out of school?

PETERSON: No.

SPANGLER: I was wondering, what was the first job that you remember having?

PETERSON: Well, it's hard to say. Outside of home you mean?

SPANGLER: Yes.

PETERSON: Well, I would have to say I was cutting bands for an old horse-powered thrashing machine for many years. That was about the first job that I did outside of home that I got paid for.

SPANGLER: How much did you get paid?

PETERSON: Eighty cents a day.

SPANGLER: Eighty cents a day. [laughter] Times have changed. Was this pretty hard work then?

PETERSON: No, it wasn't hard but it was kind of strenous. Anyway, you had to stand there from the time they started up until they quit.

SPANGLER: It was real steady then?

PETERSON: Yes, you could hardly get a drink of water.

SPANGLER: So what would you do after work on one of those days for entertainment?

PETERSON: Well, there wasn't hardly anything to do when you came home from work. It was just about time to retire.

SPANGLER: Did you ever read any books? What was your past-time--hunting maybe?

PETERSON: Well, a little of everything. [laughter]

SPANGLER: That's about right. I was wondering, you said you worked on a farm. Can you remember any of the machines that they had? You were mentioning a thrasher.

PETERSON: Well, I can remember all of the machines that I ever had. We had walking plows. We had to walk behind. We had to look behind the plows, you know. And I never had a riding plow before I started farming myself, never a riding cultivator. I had to do all the walking behind the two.

SPANGLER: Do you attribute this to your good health now at this age?

PETERSON: It seems that work doesn't kill anybody.

SPANGLER: Some of these machines you were saying that you walked behind. I imagine these were all horse drawn then?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: What would you have, a different number of teams for them?

PETERSON: You had three horses. After awhile they got gang plows, riding plows; they had four or five horses on them.

SPANGLER: What were some of the names of the different machines? Now we have different names like John Deere. I imagine they had them then, too.

PETERSON: Yes, John Deere was a standby as far as I can remember.

SPANGLER: What were some of the different names?

PETERSON: Well, they had Emerson plows and Hagen Handerson. That was a company in Ottawa. They even made plows in Morris, Morris plows.

SPANGLER: Oh really?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Were they a pretty decent plow?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Where were they made?

PETERSON: Well, the building is torn down. It was right there where the Morris Grain Elevator Company is.

SPANGLER: Oh, you had to be down by the river?

PETERSON: No, up by the railroad. I can remember the building. It was all painted yellow. I thought it was so

awkward.

SPANGLER: What was this, a one-bottom plow?

PETERSON: No, it was a riding plow. They had both single and gang plows. What the funny part was was the axle that the wheel stood on revolved on the bearings that were fastened to the frame and the wheel didn't revolve on the axis. [laughter] That was outstanding, you know.

SPANGLER: Did you put on a lot of fertilizer then or was there such a thing then?

PETERSON: There wasn't any fertilizer in those days.

SPANGLER: It was right through the barn?

PETERSON: Yes, manure from the barn. They had to pitch it into the old wagon box by hand and spread it by hand. I expect around the 1910's was when they got the manure spreader. That was quite an improvement.

SPANGLER: So you just shoveled this stuff into a wagon and go out and throw it around?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: That would be quite a job.

PETERSON: Yes, it was quite a job.

SPANGLER: How long would it take to clean out a good-sized barn by that?

PETERSON: Oh, you didn't do it in one day, you took it just as much time allowed you to do it.

SPANGLER: I see. It might take you anywhere from a week to two weeks.

PETERSON: Yes, probably a month.

SPANGLER: I was kind of curious, what was the acreage of an average farm?

PETERSON: It was 80 acres or 160 acres, probably some had more, but if you had 160 you always had to have a hired man.

SPANGLER: And than these hired men, how much pay did they receive?

PETERSON: Well, all the way from $20.00 to $25.00 a month.

SPANGLER: Did they live right on the farm usually?

PETERSON: Yes, they lived right with the family. Or sometimes there would be a family man that would have a house that he lived in, but that wasn't very often.

SPANGLER: He could probably hardly raise a family.

PETERSON: I have thought about it a good many times, how in the world they could live? They probably had three or four kids, and only got from $20.00 to $25.00 a month.

SPANGLER: And then they had to buy all their supplies and stuff like that.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Can you remember if there were any floods or anything around here? Some floods, tornados or natural disasters that came through?

PETERSON: Oh, we had some. They weren't just too bad. They ripped up some trees and one thing or another. There wasn't anybody hurt or anything.

SPANGLER: Did you ever loose your crops to this?

PETERSON: No.

SPANGLER: A little damage from hail probably.

PETERSON: Well, some but not a total loss. Now, we hadn't had a total failure around here as long as I can remember. In '34 that was the dry year. That was the only year that I can remember we didn't hardly raise any grain.

SPANGLER: So in 1934 how much did you get that year, say off an eighty acre farm or how much were you farming then?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. The only other thing that I can remember is that we went from one place to the other thrashing and we probably thrashed four or five places in a day, and probably three or four wagonloads of oats from forty or fifty acres, and that wasn't first grade grain, you know. I know over at your place there, I believe we three wagon loads from forty or fifty acres. That was just about a total failure.

SPANGLER: That is a pretty good farm, too.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Well, I was wondering, where would you get your supplies when you were farming back then? Would you go to Morris to get them?

PETERSON: Well, as far as groceries or things, they had three grocery stores in Lisbon and that is only three miles from here. So we just bought all of our groceries there. Now there isn't a store, a grocery store. There isn't anything left in Lisbon, only implement.

SPANGLER: There was a town that has grown up with the times and the times have smothered it out.

PETERSON: There were two drug stores, three grocery store, hardware stores and. . .

SPANGLER: Oh, they you had a general store like that, a hardware store.

PETERSON: Just a hardware store and the feed mill and they even had a jail.

SPANGLER: Did they have that much problems around here?

PETERSON: Yes, they had a cow in there on the Fourth of July. [laughter]

SPANGLER: I know they still have a parade up there.

Now which ceremony is that?

PETERSON: That is the Homecoming and Labor Day.

SPANGLER: Yes, that's right, Labor Day. I was trying to remember that. HOw long have they been having that?

PETERSON: Oh, I expect for the last forty-five years.

SPANGLER: Then what were their parades or anything before that? They didn't have anything?

PETERSON: No. They used to have celebrations there probably for the Fourth of July. At least that is about the only other time we had a celebration there. I can remember when Labor Day was first honored or celebrated.

SPANGLER: Do you remember the year?

PETERSON: No, I expect. No, I wouldn't know exactly, but it would be around the end of the nineteen century.

SPANGLER: And so you have been farming all your life?

PETERSON: Well, with the exception of three when I was doing carpenter work.

SPANGLER: Then you probably built some of the buildings around here.

PETERSON: The biggest part of them right around here.

SPANGLER: I understand you built all the farm buildings on one farm down here.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: What did you get paid for that?

PETERSON: Well, all the way from $1.50 to $2.00 a day and it would be from 15¢ to 20¢ an hour.

SPANGLER: Say if you wanted a snack or something and then you got a candy bar, how much would that cost?

PETERSON: Well, as far as I can remember, they always cost a nickel.

SPANGLER: Now, I know they are up to 15 or 20¢. That would be a full hours work for you. [laughter] When did you have your first car?

PETERSON: 1915.

SPANGLER: And what kind was that?

PETERSON: It was a Dodge.

SPANGLER: And that was a 4-cylinder.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Did that run pretty good?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Did you have any problems with it? Do you remember anything that gave you a hard time with it?

PETERSON: No.

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SPANGLER: How far would you usually go with that, up to Lisbon and Lisbon and Morris?

PETERSON: That was about all you would drive sround. You didn't take any long trips, you know.

SPANGLER: And then, where was a gas station; in Lisbon?

PETERSON: Well, every grocery store had a gasoline tank that you would fill. A five gallon can put in your car and that was all there was to it.

SPANGLER: You probably got pretty good milege then.

PETERSON: Well, I don't know just what the mileage you would get. I expect in a car like that you would get 20 miles. The first year I had a car I got my gas from the. . . well they delivered for the farmers. They had a 50 gallon drum or something like that. About 5¢ a gallon [laughter]

SPANGLER: I wish those were the times now. From what I understand, we aren't going to have anymore if we keep using it at the present rate.

PETERSON: The first year I had a car, I bought gas for 5¢ a gallon. Well gas today wouldn't be over probably more than 20¢ a gallon if it wasn't for the taxes. Taxes booost the price. I don't know how many taxes there on a gallon of gas. There must be four at least.

SPANGLER: There are quite a few now, I know. As long as we are talking about motor vehicles, when did you get your first tractor?

PETERSON: Well, I expect around the 30's. And I had a Fordson for some years, and I know I got the A.C. in '38 or '39. So it must have been in the early 30's that I got the Fordson.

SPANGLER: And that was the Fordson tractor. Oh, I had never heard of that. [laughter]

PETERSON: We have the Ford tractors now.

SPANGLER: Oh the Ford. I'm sorry, that is a good tractor.

PETERSON: Well, it was alright in those days, but you'd hate to have one now.

SPANGLER: Then what were you pulling. You probably had a two-bottom plow.

PETERSON: Yes, you had a two-bottom plow. I pulled with it and a tandom disk. You could cultivate with them, you know.

SPANGLER: How many horses did you have before you had the tractor?

PETERSON: Well, we had four on this place here. I believe I had fifteen horses, and then we had two hired men on the other place. When I moved over here on this I only had four horses because it was only sixty acres and I could do that with them.

SPANGLER: You tried to get by with the minimum number of horses that you could. That was pretty expensive keeping them up. Did you do your own shoeing and stuff--grooming?

PETERSON: No.

SPANGLER: Where did you take them to have that done?

PETERSON: Well, the Blacksmith's Shop.

SPANGLER: Where would that be?

PETERSON: Well, they had one in Lisbon a long time and then in Morris. It was twenty cents a show. I don't know. I expect it's about $20 now.

SPANGLER: They don't even have too many.

PETERSON: No. They don't specialize in it. I just read a piece here a little while ago out, I don't know where it is, but it is not too far away from here,that they shoe horses and it costs about $20 or so to shoe a horse.

SPANGLER: You could get a horse done for eighty cents then?

PETERSON: Well, around $1.50.

SPANGLER: Then that was quite an investment.

PETERSON: That was the biggest investment in those days. Tools, that was nothing.

SPANGLER: They used the horse for power, to be generated, and then you alway had the upkeep.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Always put up a lot more hay then we do now probably.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Out of your sixty acre farm, about how much would you leave aside for hay?

PETERSON: Well, you always had hay in the pastures. You would probably have ten acres in hay. It depended on how many cattle you had.

SPANGLER: Did you have many cattle?

PETERSON: Oh, I had quite a few. I had about half of the farm in pasture and meadow. I had pure bred Holsteins.

SPANGLER: Oh, and they're good milkers.

PETERSON: Yes, and I tell you I belonged to the Milk Testing Association in Kendell County and they came down here because they lacked a member. They had to have thirty. They needed one man for every day of the month, so I told them I would sign up. They wanted me, too. You know that year I had the highest herd for six months straight.

SPANGLER: That was quite an honor.

PETERSON: Yes, because there was a guy up in Oswego that had always been high man before and came down here and wanted to buy my whole herd because I beat him.

SPANGLER: When you talk about having top heard, what do you mean by that?

PETERSON: The most butterfat.

SPANGLER: You see a lot of people wouldn't know that.

PETERSON: No. The highest producing herd in butterfat, see.

SPANGLER: And what was that used for mostly?

PETERSON: Butter.

SPANGLER: And so the more butterfat you got the higher your ranking was.

PETERSON: You'd have cream separators in those days. That separated the milk and sold the cream. I shipped a lot of cream to Chicago.

SPANGLER: And where in Chicago?

PETERSON: Well, there were several different firms that bought cream in Illinois.

SPANGLER: When how did they ship this stuff--in a wagon?

PETERSON: No, they shipped it on a train, by rail.

SPANGLER: That was probably the best method of transportation on land.

PETERSON: Yes, it was. You just took it down to the freight or express depot and that was all you had to do, and then they transported it to where it was supposed to go.

SPANGLER: Then did you have to pay the transportation costs?

PETERSON: They took the transportation out of you check, yes.

SPANGLER: Then how much was that?

PETERSON: Well, I couldn't say now. It wasn't a dollar.

SPANGLER. Oh, it wasn't a dollar?

PETERSON: No.

SPANGLER: How large were the cans?

PETERSON: Eight gallons. Well, they had five and eight gallon cream cans.

SPANGLER: Well, I bet those locomotives back then weren't like they are now.

PETERSON: Well, don't you remember the steam locomotives?

SPANGLER: No. [laughter]

PETERSON: I thought maybe. . .

SPANGLER: I remember them, but I mean I have never seen them working.

PETERSON: It seems to me that it hasn't been that many years since they discontinued them. But it might be fifteen or twenty years now.

SPANGLER: Those were pretty effective then.

PETERSON: Yes. I feel kind of lonesome for those old steam locomotives. You could here them whistle way out here you know.

SPANGLER: How far is theis farm here from the railroad tracks?

PETERSON: Well, it's about seven miles from Morris.

SPANGLER: And you could hear their whistle way out here?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Then that was all the excess pressure building up that they had to leave off?

PETERSON: No, they whistled for every crossing and whistled for Morris and whistled when they started out for Morris. Like the diesels now, they whistle too. They have a siren, but it doesn't sound familiar to an old guy like me. [laughter]. So there has been quite a change.

SPANGLER: You were talking about the feed mill in Lisbon. that kind of interested me. You know, because they haven't had them around for awhile now.

PETERSON: Well, you took grain there and had it ground for your cattle or hogs.

SPANGLER: What year did that go out of business?

PETERSON: Well, I expect it has been forty or fifty years ago. There isn't anything left of it up in Libson.

SPANGLER: That must have been quite a growing town.

PETERSON: No, Lisbon is bigger today as far as area is concerned than it was in those days, but they had all those accomodations, you know, groceries. They even had a saloon in Lisbon, you know.

SPANGLER: Oh, really?

PETERSON: Yes, for many years.

SPANGLER: Lisbon is dry now.

PETERSON: They started two railroads there. The Pike and Regular are there if you know where to look for them. South of the cemetery.

SPANGLER: I don't.

PETERSON: Well, it is visible if you drive through Lisbon. They all went up the spout, as they say, and it never matured.

SPANGLER: Where were they going to go with that?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. It must have been aimed for Chicago and I don't know where. I walked on that pike to Lisbon when I lived up there the first year I farmed. I don't know just exactly what they aimed for.

SPANGLER: It was probably one of the large shipping cities.

PETERSON: Yes, it must have been.

SPANGLER: It had to be Chicago or Joliet.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Was Joliet pretty big back then?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. Joliet has been a main town or city as long as I can remember. They always had the prison up there. When you would say that you were going to Joliet, they would always josh you for going to the pen, you know, when you talked about Joliet.

SPANGLER: Well, that has been there quite a few years then.

PETERSON: Yes. It was here. The new place, what do they call it now?

SPANGLER: Stateville?

PETERSON: Yes, Stateville. I can remember when that was... There is part of the old prison left yet. They always had the women folk there, I guess. I don't know whether this is the system now or what it is.

SPANGLER: I was wondering, what else do you remember about Joliet? Did you ever get up there?

PETERSON: No, we hardly got up there to Joliet. It was

too far to drive with horses and we didn't have machines. Twenty-five or twenty-six miles was quite a drive with a team of horses.

SPANGLER: About how many times a year would you get up there? Maybe twice?

PETERSON: No, it wasn't very often.

SPANGLER: Then I bet the times you did get up there you remembered it.

PETERSON: Well, I believe that we got to Chicago probably more often then to Joliet. We always took the train so we could go up there once in a while, you know.

SPANGLER: Were you ever up there when they had the horses on the street and everything else?

PETERSON: Oh, yes. [laughter] I rode from one depot to another in a hack. You know, they called that there with the horses. And the streets were cobblestones or wood blocks that they had set on end.

SPANGLER: Now most of them are pavement or asphalt.

PETERSON: Yes, so you wouldn't sink down in the mud, you know.

SPANGLER: Then you probably don't remember the big Chicago fire, or do you remember?

PETERSON: No, I don't remember.

SPANGLER: It was before your time?

PETERSON: That was in '71. That was before I was born.

SPANGLER: I bet when you got up to Chicago you were surprised at the buildings.

PETERSON: Yes. Now you need binoculars to see the top of the Sears building. [laughter]

SPANGLER: How tall were the building back then?

PETERSON: Oh, they were probably 30 or 35 stories. When you got up there you wondered how in the world they built those. But now you know they wouldn't be considered anything, you know, compared to those new buildings.

SPANGLER: That would be a small building.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: So how far did you get away from home in those days, say, on a vacation trip?

PETERSON: [laughter] We never had any vacations.

SPANGLER: Oh, you didn't do much traveling then. Pretty well tied around to this area.

PETERSON: If we wanted to go anyplace, you would either take a train or else you would stay home. If you had to rely on horses you couldn't. Well as I say, Joliet would be just about as far as you would venture out with a team of horses.

You would go up there and have a cup of coffee and come back home again.

SPANGLER: Yes, times have sure changed. I notice your stove over there. That is pretty interesting.

PETERSON: Well, it might be interesting to you.

SPANGLER: For you it is probably just a stove.

PETERSON: [laughter] Yes.

SPANGLER: This has got the whole top flat with nothing sticking up on the top. You were telling me one day that that is excellent for the making of lepsa, I suppose, with all that hot surface area.

PETERSON: Well, the top of the stove was all smooth, you know

SPANGLER: What do you burn in there? I saw you putting some coal in there.

PETERSON: Yes. Well, you can burn anything, cobs and coal, and wood--anything that is combustible.

SPANGLER: It's burning right now. I can even feel the heat from it from here. How does this stove cook?

PETERSON: Just like any other gas or electric stove as far as cooking. You would just put it on top of the stove. And for baking the Mrs. likes it a good deal better than gas.

SPANGLER: Why is that? More or better heat distribution?

PETERSON: [laughter] She even says it tastes better when it is baked in there. Well, in fact, our daughter over in Sheriden had a stove like that, too, but she said, "I always bake in the coal stoves because things taste better when they are baked in there than the gas stove."

SPANGLER: You still make your own bread my mom was telling me.

PETERSON: Yes, we buy the frozen dough and then we bake it. And that's just about like homemade.

SPANGLER: I was wondering, did you do any hunting for wild game or anything?

PETERSON: No, I never was interested. I think maybe you were looking at my gun there. I always had a gun because I would probably shoot some maraders that came around here like coons, and skunks, and things like that.

SPANGLER: Were there more animals back in those days than there are now?

PETERSON: Oh, there hasn't been many wild animals around here. There are more coons now and deer. I never heard of a deer around in this country until later years. There are quite a few of them.

SPANGLER: It seems they have been populating in this area.

PETERSON: Yes. Coons are now a nuisance. I can't see how we could raise chickens now like we did when we had them because of the coons. They get the best of them.

SPANGLER: Yes, I would imagine. They would kill off quite a few of them. How many chickens did you have?

PETERSON: Oh, that is a hard question to answer. We always had around fifteen or sixteen hundred laying hens.

SPANGLER: That's quite a few. You don't see an average farmer having that many.

PETERSON: It doesn't hardly pay either now because they have those big chicken farms. I don't know how many thousand. They must have fove or six hundred thousand chickens. Like this White Hen over there. His one house has 25,000 in it and there are twelve of them, so you can figure out how many.

SPANGLER: It seems that is the way farming has been going along. Back in your time they probably had a couple pigs.

PETERSON: Well, the farmer always had some pigs and some chickens. They always had their own.

SPANGLER: A little bit of everything.

PETERSON: Yes, it won't be too long that you won't see chickens anyplace.

SPANGLER: No, not running around. Now it seems that if you want to get into something, you go into it big and that's all

you go into.

PETERSON: It is just like that guy said. We have some chickens and some cows and things like that that kept us going during the Depression and that is what made everybody survive. We had a little of everything. Some things you could depend on.

SPANGLER: Yes, the Depression hit pretty hard. I don't remember it, naturally, but I'm sure that you remember a lot of things about it. Could you tell me a few of those things?

PETERSON: The early 30's when everybody went broke? [laughter] Well, there isn't hardly anything to say but that nearly every farmer went broke.

SPANGLER: Yes, I understand. You probably lost some neighbors around here.

PETERSON: Yes, they all lost their places. I told you that we pulled through without any difficulty because we didn't lose our place either, but we were the only parties that had a telephone from Morris to the Nettle Creek store. And we had to take messages and bring messages. I thought about it a good many times. They couldn't afford it. That was a pressing time.

SPANGLER: This was run almost like a message or telegraph office then. We have a lot more conveniences now as far as the house goes.

PETERSON: Oh yes. I wouldn't know what people would do if they had to go back forty or fifty years.

SPANGLER: Yes, there would probably be a lot of casualities of the machine age. How did you keep things cold back then.

PETERSON: We always had a tank and you would pump water on it. Probably you had a tank that was submerged in there that was leak proof and you put your bottle of milk and butter in there. You could keep it for a day or so and then it would melt.

SPANGLER: Was it pretty effective?

PETERSON: Yes, we were the first ones ever to have a freezer. That wasn't made for a utility freezer; it was an ice cream cabinet. I got it from the Jersey Ice Cream Company in Sandwich. I have had that for I don't know how many years.

SPANGLER: That's a thermometer?

PETERSON: Yes. I don't know how I got to know about it, but they had dozens of them up there at the old freight depot that this company had to take back because they couldn't afford to eat ice cream like that, so they had to take them back from the drug store. I bought one of them and used it for the freezer.

SPANGLER: And that was one of the first in the area?

PETERSON: Yes, it was.

SPANGLER: What did you pay for that?

PETERSON: I believe it was around a hundred dollars for it.

SPANGLER: That was quite a bit of money for the convenience.

PETERSON: Yes. You know, they didn't have a cover around like they have now where they just had a small compartment that you could put the ice cream in. They froze it in tin tubs, you know, big enough for the tub to go through. So you couldn't have anything larger than what could go through those openings. They were just as effective as the freezers now that we have. They froze anything solid in them.

SPANGLER: That was off electricity then?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: I suppose back a little further you didn't have electricity.

PETERSON: No. It wasn't until '30 that we got it, and the line route went from Seneca to Lockport, I believe. We happened to be on the line, so we were the first ones along here to get electricity.

SPANGLER: You were pretty lucky.

PETERSON: Yes, and I believe that in '28 or '29.

SPANGLER: Then what did you do with the old lanterns and stuff that you used then?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. I wish I had them. [laughter]

SPANGLER: They kind of got set aside?

PETERSON: Yes, old lamps, we had quite a few left. Now we only have one left and we have that in case of an emergency. The electricity would go off and if you didn't have that, you would sit in the dark. But you wonder a good many times how you could read with a light like that.

SPANGLER: Yes, I was wondering that, too. I saw one of them in an antique sale one time and it didn't throw off much light. It was light, but it didn't throw off a lot.

PETERSON: So we got those mantel lamps. They light up like electric lights, you know, but you had to be so careful with them or you would break the mantles.

SPANGLER: What under pressure?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Then they were run on gas?

PETERSON: Well, they ran on kerosene, too. You had to have a wick and you had to have that lighted so that it would illuminate the mantle. But those mantles were so fragile that you couldn't breathe on them.

SPANGLER: They would just crumble like that.

PETERSON: Yes, I know. Grace, that is our youngest, well, I was monkeying with the lamp and I suspect that I took the

mantle out or something like that and she kind of blew on it and she said, "I didn't know that it was rotten. [laughter] It just went to pieces.

SPANGLER: Then you have got three children?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: And how old are they?

PETERSON: Well, the oldest one is sixty-two and the other one is sixty and Grace must be sixty-five or so. I don't just exactly know.

SPANGLER: Then they probably have children of their own.

PETERSON: Yes. We have five grandchildren. Agnes has two girls, and Grace has a girl and a boy, and Sylvia has a girl.

SPANGLER: You must have three or four generations?

PETERSON: Well, that would only be three.

SPANGLER: Oh, only three now?

PETERSON: We expect to have four before the year is up. That is if everything turns out alright. [laughter]

SPANGLER: You will have to get a picture of that. A four generation picture.

PETERSON: Yes, we'll have to have one. Well, she is so

far away, about eight hundred miles. Well, just about to Burmingham, Alabama.

SPANGLER: You were the first generation here?

PETERSON: Yes, that was born here.

SPANGLER: When were you born?

PETERSON: 1882.

SPANGLER; So that would make you ninety?

PETERSON: No, it would be ninety-one. And the other guy was born in 1883. That was how I figured it. He was a year younger than I. As far as our church was concerned, I was baptised in the same church and confirmed and married and I expect I'll be buried in the same church, too.

SPANGLER: And that is the church up there?

PETERSON: Right up there. The West Lisbon Lutheran.

SPANGLER: That is an old church.

PETERSON: Well, the old church burned in 1926, so this was built in 1926 and 1927.

SPANGLER: Did they ever find out how that caught on fire?

PETERSON: Yes. They didn't have to go very far to find out, because they burned a brush pile out in the yard there

and it was Christmas yet, and a spark blew up on top of the roof. It was a shingle roof and it went just like that.

SPANGLER: I imagine you can remember when you were a small child.

PETERSON: Well, as I say, I was baptised there, and when you were baptised in the church you are a member. It was the first minister that was ever up there or minister of this congregation. He was there when I was confirmed. He confirmed me, but it was his last class. That was in 1896. And I believe I am the only member left out of that class.

SPANGLER: Yes, I see that you have a missing piece of your finger, your baby finger. Could you tell me the story behind that?

PETERSON: Well, there really isn't much of a story. Well, it was the last time I ever unloaded hay bales, and I was holding the rope that was to hoist it up and I got caught between the pulley and the rope and my finger that was missing layed on the bales.

SPANGLER: And that was an old hay fork?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Now, they don't use those anymore.

PETERSON: No.

SPANGLER: I know about eight or nine years ago we used one because we didn't have anything else. It was the best way to get it up in the barn. But now they conveyer them up.

PETERSON: Well, they use elevators now. Your mother was out here and she told me I would loose it.

SPANGLER: Your fingernail there?

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: The whole thing?

PETERSON: I almost cut the whole end off in the door. I slammed the door and got caught between the lock and the catch. Well, I got all bloodshot, you know. The last time she was out here, she said, "Well, you'll lose that nail," so she put a tape on it to keep it on. One day I was washing dishes and it fell off in the dishwater. But I'm getting a new one.

SPANGLER: You were telling me about your telephone here. That was probably the kind that you crank up.

PETERSON. Yes.

SPANGLER: How did that work?

PETERSON: Well, you cranked and it gave a signal for the central to connect you up with the party you wanted.

SPANGLER: And where was she located at? Down at the Nettle

Creek Store?

PETERSON: No, in Morris. That has been our telephone central for as long as we have had a phone. I don't know how long it has been since we have gotten the dial telephone. Probably ten or fifteen years.

SPANGLER: You probably recall when you had your first radio.

PETERSON: Well, I remember but I don't remember what year it was.

SPANGLER: That was probably the best entertainment around.

PETERSON: Yes.

SPANGLER: Just listening to the radio.

PETERSON: They were kind of complicated. It didn't work just exactly, you know. Of course, you had to have batteries. They were all batteries in those days. I never had a battery cell. I didn't get a radio before we got electricity because they were more foolproof. If your battery got low and you had to have at least two cells. Batteries, I don't know what they call them now, they have to have a big battery for reception, I suspect, and they had to have a B battery, they called them. I don't know what they were for. They were a smaller battery.

SPANGLER: You had to have two sets of batteries?

PETERSON: Yes, you had to have two before it would work.

SPANGLER: Did you ever get a pickup truck later on after you got your car?

PETERSON: Yes, I have had three or four pickups.

SPANGLER: What year was the first one?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. Probably in the 20's. It was a Ford, Ford Runabout. They took the turtle--they called it a turtle they had on the back and made a truck out of it and had it for a pickup.

SPANGLER: So it was like a car before and then after you got it you changed it into a pickup.

PETERSON: And then I had a Ford gearshift, and I had a Plymouth and the last one I had was a 1941 Dodge. That was up there this spring. It has been standing in the garage many years.

SPANGLER: I bet the Illinois River sure came in handy as far as water transport for grain and stuff like that.

PETERSON: Yes. Well, they had canals before. I can remember old mules and the tow path, they called it. I don't know why they don't use it. Up until last year they used it to tow back. They had big boats,you know,to hold grain enroute to Chicago.

SPANGLER: Yes. There were a lot of different jobs around then. You could lead mules or . . .

PETERSON: Down there where that apartment building is, Washburns? You know where that is?

SPANGLER: Yes.

PETERSON: Well, that used to be an old barn where they kept mules in. Washburn had mules to pull barges along the canal.

SPANGLER: That is where he sheltered them?

PETERSON: Yes. There must have been at least four if not five grain elevators along the canal. Is it all done now?

SPANGLER: I think it is getting there. Mr. Peterson, what year was the first year that you voted for President?

PETERSON: Well, that was in 1906.

SPANGLER: Who did you vote for then?

PETERSON: Teddy Roosevelt. I was a Republican at that time. When times got real bad, I switched over to the other party because it got so bad I thought something had to be done.

SPANGLER: Teddy was a pretty good president.

PETERSON: Yes. He was. . . I even voted for him when he ran under Bull Moose party.

SPANGLER: Yes. He was under that third party. Well, what year was that?

PETERSON: That was in 1912.

SPANGLER: Then can you remember the presidents you voted for in succesion after that?

PETERSON: Well, I voted a Republican ticket up until it was 1926 when Al Smith, Hoover and Al Smith. Hoover under the Republican and Al Smith on the Democratic party. That was when I switched.

SPANGLER: What did you think about Hoover?

PETERSON: Well, I didn't think much of him. I said before that if that guy is ever nominated for president, I would never vote for him, because he tried to play a trick on the farmers when he was food adminstrator. He said he would promise the farmers the price of 12 bushels of corn for a hundred pounds of hogs. When the time came around, hogs went down to just about nothing and corn was a pretty good price. Then I thought to myself, that is not the man for our line of business.

SPANGLER: So he was a kind of a scandelous president.

PETERSON: No. He was alright for his business. He was an engineer of some kind. But he was food administrator. Well, I suspect he did pretty well on that line, but then he was running for president. I thought to myself, I don't believe that guy is the right man for that job and he wasn't.

It wasn't just the farmers, everything went bad. So Roosevelt, I voted four times for that man.

SPANGLER: You must have really liked the way he handled things. What did you like about Roosevelt?

PETERSON: Well, I thought he was a good man for the common people.

SPANGLER: He wasn't just for the underdog or the high man.

PETERSON: No. That is just it. And the Democratic party has always been for the common people. While the Republicans have always been for the capitalists, aristocrats or whatever you want to call them. And I am not the only man. . . there aren't many Democrats in Nettle Creek. I know when the girls went to school, most of them made fun of them because they belonged to the Democrats.

SPANGLER: There has always been this little show-down between the Republicans and the Democrats. [laughter]

PETERSON: It is nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody has to do what they please.

SPANGLER: Which president do you really think did the most for the country in your life span?

PETERSON: Well, Roosevelt.

SPANGLER: Yes. He seems to be the favorite. Do you think he would straighten things out now if he were in office?

PETERSON: Well, I don't know. They are taking advantage of what he accomplished now. Take union wages now, they are unreasonable now. They take advantage of it. Take a carpenter today. He gets from $6 to $12 an hour. Why, I had to work a week for that. It has gotten out of hand entirely now. It was at a better change in those days. I can't see how in the world we would have existed when you had to sell corn for twelve cents a bushel and hogs for two and a half cents a pound. That is not very much and we weren't too enthusiastic about it.

SPANGLER: Yes, that's right. He got the nation back on its feet.

PETERSON: Yes, but as I say, not it has gone wild, too. Land, a thousand dollars an acre. When I was a kid land around here solf for fifty, well, I paid forty for some one mile down from the five corners. And the same land now is selling for . . .

PETERSON: For a thousand dollars an acre at least.

SPANGLER: At least. Maybe even twelve hundred dollars.

PETERSON: So it goes to extremes, you know. And I think that some day it is going to . . . Well, it can't keep on going up and going up. What is going up must always come down they say.

SPANGLER: What they need to do is cut all the prices of everything right in half.

PETERSON: Well, if everything went in proportion it wouldn't really be bad, but when it is out of proportion then it gets bad.

SPANGLER: What were the first machines you had on your farm? You had the first machines, you were telling me one other time. When you started farming you paid $350 for all of your equipment?

PETERSON: Yes. Well, I suspect it didn't even cost that much.

SPANGLER: What were those implements?

PETERSON: Well, you had to have a plow, you had to have a disc, you had to have a harrow, you had to have a planter, you had to have a cultivator, and that was about all that you had to have. You picked the corn by hand. And then some individuals owned shellers and thrashing machines to thrash the grain and shell the corn. What we has was a thrashing ring here that we owned our own thrashing machine. I've owned three of them.

SPANGLER: What kind were they?

PETERSON: Well, the first kind was a Reeves, and then the other one was a Minneapolis, and the third one was an International.

SPANGLER: Which one was the best?

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